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ABSTRACT

A dropout and flunk-out rate of 50% during the freshman year is occurring in many large municipal institutions of higher education, especially those operating under an open admission policy. This high rate of attrition is felt to be due, in part, to the fact that students entering college under open admissions policies often do not have the basic skills necessary to facilitate learning. It is considered that action research is needed to investigate the relationships between reading scores and grades in order to develop insight and possible administrative solutions to the problems. (HS)

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AN OPEN ADMISSIONS POLICY, READING ABILITY AND GRADES

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Abstract

The relationships among open admissions, reading ability, and grades are varied and complex. The problems have not been resolved. Action research is needed for the benefit of the student and for the benefit of the institution. Money, time, and effort need to be used much more efficiently. This paper selectively surveys the area.

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An open admissions policy is practiced by many colleges and universities in America and dictated by law in some states.[1] Such a policy insures matriculation in a state institution of higher education for all high school graduates, regardless of past academic achievement. Consequently, even though the reading ability of approximately on-third of the incoming freshmen has been shown to be deficient,[2] state institutions are required to accept and to meet the needs of these students. As a result, opposition to the theory of open admissions has been forthcoming from educators, governmental leaders, and taxpayers.[3]

If an open admissions policy is to continue, programs meeting the needs of students with limited skills will have to be developed. College reading programs designed to increase reading ability are often very involved and costly. One reason for this is that reading is a body of skills, not a subject, per se, and the skills considered as part

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[1]Homer L. Carter, "The Impact of Today's Students upon College Programs in Reading," Twentieth Yearcook of the National Reading Conference (Milwaukee: National Reading Conference, 1970),p. 336.

[2]Dorinda McClellan, "A Comparison of Reading Acility of Junior College Students with the Readacility Levels Assigned Texts" (paper read at the National Reading Conference, Decemcer, 1970, St. Petersburg, Florida), (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, Dec., 1970).

[3]Carter, loc.cit.

of reading, vary. Triggs has noted that reading at the college level must involve the following skills: "word recognition, vocabulary, speed, apprehension of meaning, and appreciation."[4] Cohen developed high intensity learning centers which identify 504 specific reading behaviors.[5] Carter indicated that study skills are often considered part of reading; he noted that these skills are necessary

> to identify ideas; to read for a purpose; to make ideas one's own; to make the most of words; what to accept and what to reject; how to skim a textbook effectively; to concentrate; to read different kinds of literature; to read in the field of mathematics; to read in the field of science; to read in the social studies; and to read creatively.[6]

Another problem associated with college reading programs is attitude--college students are not interested in reading, per se. They want courses which will help them read their textbooks; they want, and expect, courses which will insure that they will get better grades.[7] Unfortunately, such benefits can not be guaranteed by college reading courses.

Many of the studies evaluating college reading programs use only improved reading skills as the criterion. For example, test score gains have been reported for participants in reading programs at the

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[4]Frances Triggs, "Reading at the College Level," Journal of Higher Education, 20:65-70, 112, February, 1949.

[5]S. Alan Cohen, unpublished paper describing the High Intensity Learning Centers, obtained at the University of Nebraska at Omaha HiLinc Center, March, 1972.

[6]Carter, op. cit., p. 337.

[7]Ibid.

University of Wisconsin, Quinsigamond Junior College, University of Maryland, University of Southern Mississippi, and Fordham University.[8] There are fewer studies which utilize grade point average as the criterion of success, but extremely variable results are reported. Studies done at the University of Minnesota, Washington State University, University of Pennsylvania, and Lincoln College revealed improved grade point averages for students taking reading courses,[9] but contrary results were reported by Losak, Wilson, Regensberg, and Colvin.[10]

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[8]V. Bahe, "Reading Instruction and College Achievement, "Reading Improvement, 6:57-61, 77, Winter, 1969; see also J. W. Brown, M. Watson, and R. Bowden, "Building Basic Skills at the Community Level: A New Approach," Journal of the Reading Specialist, 9:144-150, 158, May, 1970; see also S.D. Marani and M. Maxwell, "A Reading and Study Skills Program for Medical Laboratory Assistants, "Journal of Reading, 11:615-620, May, 1968; see also B. Guice, "An Experiment Combining Instruction in Comprehension with Practice in the Cloze Procedure in Reading," Dissertation Abstracts, 28:143A , July, 1967; see also J. Cashman, "A Study of the Relationship Between Organic Factors, Certain Selected Variables and Progress in a Reading Improvement Program," Dissertation Abstracts, 27:1648A, December, 1966.

[9]Dayton Hultgren and James Crewe, "Athletic Department Reading and Study Skills Program--A Model in Search of Other Applications," Seventeenth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (Milwaukee: National Reading Conference, 1969), pp. 61-64; see also I. Kelly and D. Mech, "The Relationship Between College Reading Laboratory Experience and Gain in College Grade Point Average, "Journal of the Reading Specialist, 7:50-54, December, 1967; see also M. Lesnik, "The Effects of an Individual Counseling Program on Study Behavior," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:2725A, January, 1970; see also L. Wade, "A Description of a Junior College Reading Program," Seventeenth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (Milwaukee: National Reading Conference, 1969), pp.212-224.

[10]J. Losak, "An Experiment Designed to Evaluate a Program Developed to Aid the Academically Unprepared Junior College Student," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:5256A, June, 1970; see also R. Wilson, "The Influence of the Effective Study Course at the University of Mississippi Upon Academic Achievement," Dissertation Abstracts, 29:1058A-1059A, Oct., 1968; see also G. Regenscurg, "Relationship Between Participation in a Reading Improvement Course and Grade Point Averages Of College Freshmen," Dissertation Abstracts, 27:1559A, December, 1966; see also C. Colvin, "A Reading Program that Failed--Or Did It?" Journal of Reading, 12:142-146, November, 1968.

A student's deficiency in reading may or may not be suggestive of poor academic achievement at the college or university level. Although it has typically been taken for granted that reading ability can predict college success, there are many studies done in this area which indicate that reading or verbal skills do not contribute significantly or contribute only partially to the accurate prediction of academic success.[11] There have been many factors other than reading identified as predictors of academic success--high school grades,[12] intelligence test scores,[13] knowing how to study,[14] motivation,[15] etc.

There are many reading tests available and one of the most popular and frequently used tests of college reading programs is the Nelson Denny Reading Test.[16] This test has three subtests(reading

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[11]Emery Bliesmer, "The Status of Research in College Reading," "Fourth Yearbook Southwest Reading Conference (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1955), p. 31.

[12]Clifford Lunneborg and Patricia Lunneborg, "Predicting Sucess in Community College Vocational Courses," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16:353-357, July, 1969.

[13]G.W. Derflinger, "The Prediction of College Success--A Summary of Recent Findings," Journal of the American Association of College Registrars, 19:68-78, 1943, reviewed by G.S. Speers, Psychological Abstracts, 18:65, February 1944.

[14]Otello Desiderato and Patricia Koskinen, "Anxiety, Study Hacits, and Academic Achievement," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16:162-165, March, 1969; see also Joseph Marshall, "Non-cognitive Variables as a Predictor of Academic Achievement among Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors at Abilene Christian College," Dissertation Abstracts, 29: 3833A, May, 1969.

[15]H. A. Robinson, "A Note on the Value of College Remedial Reading Courses," Journal of Educational Psychology, 41:83-96, Feb., 1950.

[16]Charles Colvin, "Methods and Materials in College Reading Programs--Pennsylvania Revisited, Part II," Journal of the Reading Specialist, 7:43-49, December, 1967.

comprehension, vocabulary, and reading rate) and was standardized using five types of institutions (universities, liberal arts colleges, teachers colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools). The total standardization population consisted of 7,500 students.[17] The Nelson Denny Reading Test has also been used for predictive purposes with varying success. Studies by Green and by Pabst did not show scores on the Nelson Denny Reading Test to be predictive of academic achievement,[18] while Bradshaw's study revealed the test was effective for this purpose.[19]

A dropout, flunk-out, push-out rate of 50% during the freshman year is noted in many large municipal, non-live-in institutions of higher education. Reading may be a factor contributing to the "mortality rate."[20] Action research is needed to investigate the relationships between reading scores and grades in order to develop insight and possible administrative solutions to the problems.

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[17] James Brown, The Nelson Denny Reading Test (rev. ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin), 1960, pp. 28-30.

[18] J. H. Green, "An Analysis of Academic Proficiency of the 1965-66 Beginning Freshman Class, School of Business, Texas Southern University, Houston, Texas," Dissertation Abstracts, 29:332A-3324A, April, 1969; see also R. Pabst, "A Validation Study of the Relationship of Size of High School and Certain Intellective Factors to Academic Achievement in College," Dissertation Abstracts, 27:331A-332A, August, 1966.

[19] O. L. Bradshaw, "The Relationship of Selected Measures of Aptitude, Interest, and Personality to Academic Achievement in Engineering and Engineering Technology," Dissertation Abstracts, 30: 979A, September, 1969.

[20] L. Breen, "The Relation of Reading Ability to College Mortality of Certain Entering Freshmen at the University of Washington in the Year 1950-51," Dissertation Abstracts, 14:483, March, 1954.